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AUTHOR Bell, Louise C.
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ABSTRACT

The individualized reading approach is a means of teaching reading to middle school students using self-selection of books by students, individual teacher-student conferences, and grouping according to needs and interests. During the teacher-student conferences, the students share their feelings about the book they are reading as the teacher assesses reading interests, abilities, needs, and comprehension. Groups are then formed to teach skills or to combine students with similar interests. Once these groups have reached their goals, they are disbanded and new ones are formed. Before selecting books for the program a teacher should survey students to determine their reading attitudes and interests. The classroom should provide a place for individual conferences and ease of movement, and possibly a learning center offering skill enhancement activities. A teacher should establish routines with students and make them aware of independent activities in which they will be involved. Activities that will provide opportunities for students to share what they have read include writing an advertisement for the book, writing a television program based on the story, and designing a book jacket. (Copies of a reading interest survey and a student evaluation checklist are included.) (HTH)

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INDIVIDUALIZING A MIDDLE SCHOOL READING PROGRAM

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LOUISE C. BELL, Ed. D.

Visiting Assistant Professor

University of Montana

Missoula, Montana

CS006189

Individualizing a Middle School
Reading Program
Louise C. Bell

Individualized reading is concerned with the overall development of each student's reading skills and interests. The approach emphasizes the development of the individual student rather than the materials and their sequence (Spache and Spache, 1977). Student differences are provided for while recognizing that interest is a major factor in learning to read. Activities are designed to meet the needs and interests of the learner.

At the middle school level, students come to school with a range of reading abilities which may vary from a third grade to a college reading level. Thus an individualized reading program becomes not only desirable but essential if we are to meet the needs of middle school students and allow them to develop at their own pace.

What Is An Individualized Reading Approach?

The individualized reading approach (Veatch, 1978) is a means of teaching reading utilizing the following:

1) self-selection of books by students
2) individual teacher-student conferences
3) groupings according to students' needs and interests

The student selects reading material based upon his/her interests and reading ability. Books should be available on a wide variety of subjects and at a range of reading levels. Paperback and library books, newspapers and magazines provide an inexpensive source of reading material.

The individual teacher-student conference is the highlight of the individualized reading program. The student shares his/her feelings about the book s/he is reading as the teacher assesses reading interests,

abilities and needs. The conference becomes an informal means of diagnosing reading skills and comprehension and encourages further reading. It yields information helpful in planning future reading goals and objectives.

For the conference, the student reads a brief selection from the book s/he has chosen. As the student reads orally, the teacher notes any reading problems for which instruction should be provided later. Questions related to what has been read are asked. During each conference, teacher efforts are directed towards a specific goal. These may include evaluating:

1) word recognition techniques
2) comprehension skills
3) study skills
4) oralreading characteristics
5) silence reading characteristics
6) student evaluation of books read
7) book sharing projects undertaken

To investigate how well a student understood what has been read, the teacher uses open ended questions at a variety of comprehension levels. These might include the following:

I. Literal (recall)
   A. Where did the story take place?
   B. What was it about?
   C. Describe one character from the story.

II. Comprehension (understand)
   A. What was the most exciting incident in the story?
   B. Is the story believable? Why or why not?
   C. Why did the main character behave as s/he did?

III. Application (solve the problem in a new situation)

A. How did the story make you feel? Why?

B. What lesson did the story teach you?

C. Which character would you not like to be ? Why?

IV. Analysis (break idea into parts for logical analysis)

A. What is the meaning of the title?

B. How real is the story?

C. What other stories have you read that are similar to this one? How are they similar?

V. Synthesis (combine into a statement, plan, product that is new for the student)

A. If you could change the story how would you do it?

B. What sould effects would you use for taping your story?

C. Retell this story from your own point of view.

VI. Evaluation (make a judgment about something using some criteria)

A. What is your opinion of _____'s behavior in this story?

B. Which character would you like to have for a friend? Why?

C. Was this book easy or difficult for you? Why?

Using diagnostic information gained from the conferences, groups are formed for a short term and a specific purpose. These groups are organized to teach skills or to combine students with similar interests for special projects. Once these groups have reached their goals, they are abandoned and new ones are formed.

As with all reading programs, the most important factor in a successful program is the teacher. A skillful, enthusiastic teacher who believes that students want to learn and can learn independently is essential.

Initiating the Program

Begin by trying to picture how the individualized reading program will function in your classroom. Discuss your plans with your principal and interested colleagues.

Before selecting books for your program, survey your students to determine their reading attitudes and interests. Use open ended sentences such as the following:

1) My reading _____.
2) When I read, words seem _____.
3) I don't understand what I read when _____.
4) My favorite book is _____.
5) The hardest thing I have read was _____.
6) I don't like to read when _____.
7) I like to read books about _____ and _____.
8) My hobbies are _____and _____.
9) My favorite t.v. program is _____. I like it because _____.
10) I enjoyed the movie named _____because _____.

Acquire a sufficient number of books and other reading material for your classroom. At least 3 - 5 books per student are suggested. They should include subjects of interest to your students and cover a wide range of reading levels.

Arrange the classroom to provide a place for individual conferences and ease of movement around the classroom. Bulletin board displays stimulate an awareness of exciting books. Learning centers offering skill enhancement activities may also be a part of the classroom. Books and supplies should be easily accessable.

Establish routines with students and make them aware of independent activities they'll be involved in while individual conferences are being held. Students may assist with setting up book displays, planning independent activities and developing record keeping systems for books they have read. Set aside time in which students may share books they have read through dramatizations, book talks and exhibits.

Determine what will be evaluated during each conference. Develop records to assist in keeping track of progress and for planning instruction.

Decide with whom to initiate the program. The teacher may begin an individualized program with a single student, a group of students or the entire class.

Sharing Books

The opportunity to share what has been read deepens the enjoyment of reading. Instead of requiring the traditional book report, offer students suggestions as to unusual means of sharing what they have read. Provide time during the reading program for the creation of these projects. During the conferences, discuss ways in which students may share what they have read with the rest of the class. Projects might include:

1) Making a diorama depicting a scene from the book.
2) Writing an advertisement for the book.
3) Designing a mobile using characters from the story.
4) Presenting a puppet show to illustrate the story.
5) Creating a comic strip about the book.
6) Writing a t.v. program based on the story.
7) Designing a book jacket.
8) Creating silhouette stick figures and presenting the story using an overhead projector.
9) Developing a slide-tape presentation of the story.

Record Keeping

It is essential that the teacher keep track of students' abilities, interests, needs and instructional programs. Record keeping should be directed towards student performance and follow-up activities suggested. Individual or group teaching is based upon this information. Effective record keeping assists teachers in diagnosis, planning, assessing and reporting programs. Records should be designed for individuals and the entire class. All records should be available for instructional and reporting purposes.

The teacher observes specific aspects of a student's reading behavior to diagnose reading skill strengths and weaknesses. A checklist provides a means of keeping track of the student's needs.

Student's Name _____

Comprehension Skills*

	Date											
Identifies main ideas												
Notes details												
Draws conclusions												
Makes generalizations												
Makes judgments												
Makes inferences												
Evaluates (fact, fiction, propaganda)												

*✓ = OK X = needs help

Grouping takes place after individual needs have been identified. Students with the same needs are grouped together for teaching purposes. To assist in forming these groups, a record keeping device for the entire class should be used.

Student's Name	Identifies Main Ideas	Notes Details	Draws Conclusions	Makes Generalizations	Makes Inferences	Evaluates

Students keep their own records regarding books they have read. This information provides the teacher with insight into the thoughts of his/her students. A form might include the following:

1) Title of Book _____.

2) Author _____.

3) The thing that interested me most was _____.

4) I did not like _____.

5) Do you think your friends would enjoy this book?_____.

Why or why not? _____.

6) What would you like to tell about this book? _____

_____.

Conclusion

An individualized reading program attempts to meet the wide range of reading abilities at the middle school level as well as promote lifelong reading habits by building upon the student's interests. Through this program, students venture into the exciting world of books with all they represent and reading becomes its own reward.

> "A teacher cannot teach everything to every pupil. There must be times when the intellectual seed germinates in the soil that has been readied by the teacher." (Veatch, 1978).

References

Spache, George D. and Evelyn B. Spache. Reading in the Elementary School. Boston: Allyn and Bacan, Inc. 1977.

Veatch, Jeanette. Reading in the Elementary School. New York: John Wiley & Co., 1978.